Archaeology of Buddhism in Vidarbha Region,

Vidarbha (Maharashtra)

Synopsis

Submitted by:

NISHANT SUNIL ZODAPE

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Guide Name: Dr. ANIL KUMAR

DEPARTMENT OF ANCIENT INDIANHISTORY, CULTURE & ARCHEOLOGY,

VISVA BHARATHI UNIVERSITY,

SHANTINIKETAN BOLPUR, WEST BANGAL-731235

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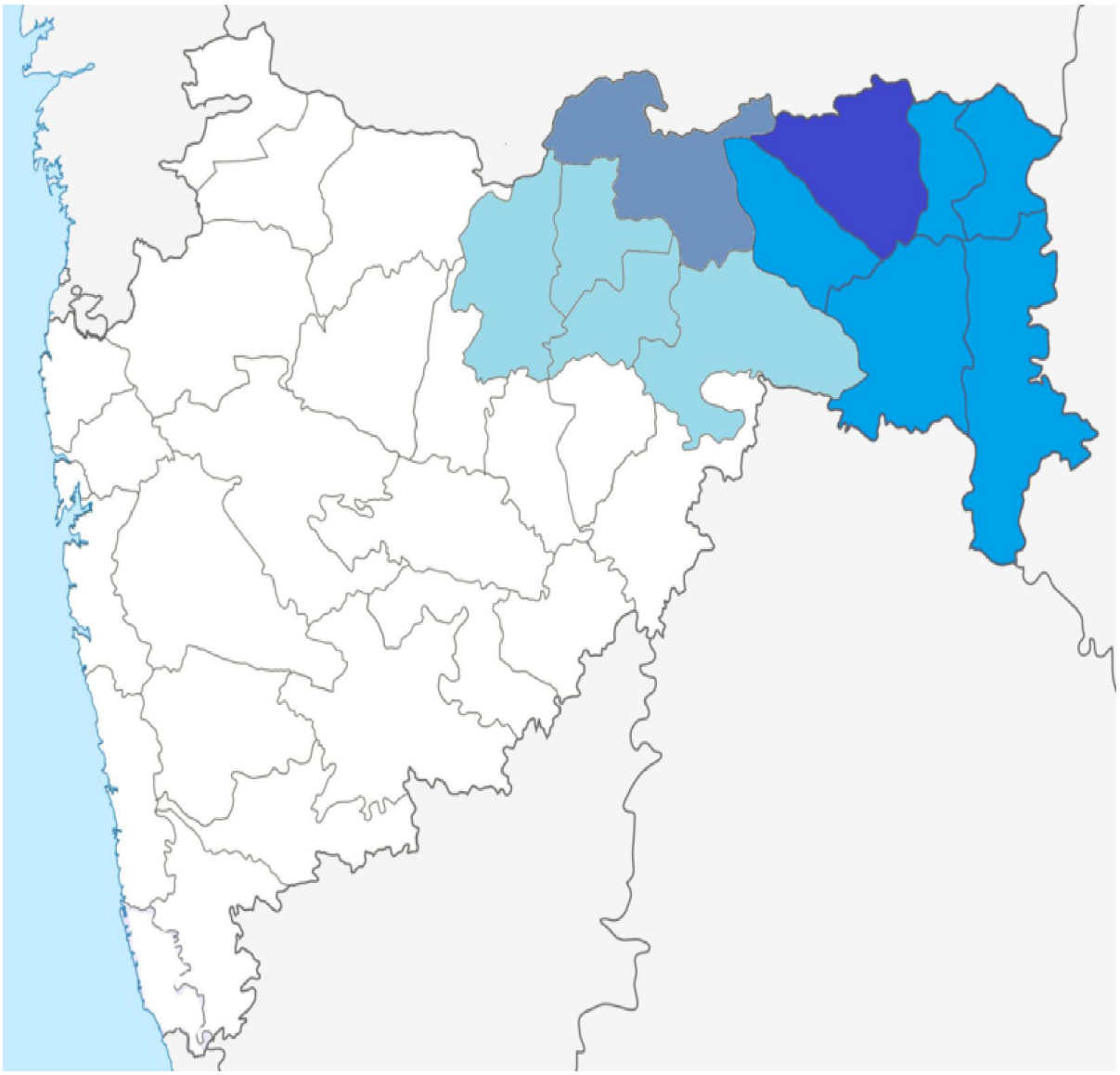
Introduction:

Vidarbha region (Lat. 19˚21' N and 76˚80' E) the study area of this synopsis is situated in eastern part of Maharashtra. Wardha River divided Vidarbha in two region eastern part and western part of Vidarbha. Presently in Vidarbha region eleven districts viz., Buldhana,Wardha, Akola, Washim, Amaravati, Yawatmal, Nagpur, Bhandara, Chandrapur, Gondia, and Gadchiroli. Vidarbha region divided in two region eastern part and western part.

Vidarbha is in the eastern region of the Indian state of Maharashtra, comprising Nagpur Division and Amravati Division. Its former name is Berar (Varhad in Marathi). It occupies 31.6% of the total area and holds 21.3% of the total population of Maharashtra. It is border the state of Madhya Pradesh to the north, Chhattisgarh in the east, Telanganain the south and Marathwada and Khandesh regions of Maharashtra in the west. Situated in central India, Vidarbha has its own rich, cultural and historical background distinct from rest of Maharashtra. The largest city in Vidarbha is Nagpur. A majority of Vidarbha people speak *Varhadi* and *Zadi* dialects of Marathi.

Vidarbha region is very rich in archaeological remains. From prehistoric time to modern times, the archaeological evidences are available in this region. But proper excavated site of this region its starts from chalcolithic period sites are 'Tulzapurgarhi, Adam, Arambha, Shrikhanda,' a large number of megalithic and historic sites and very

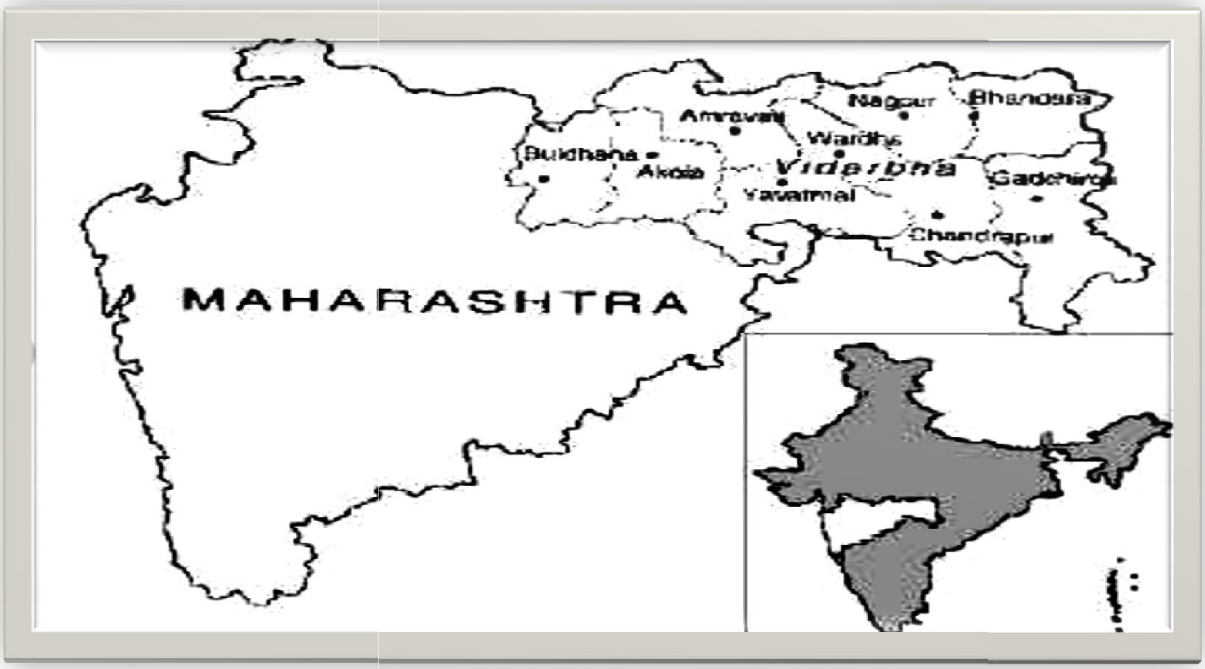
less number of prehistoric sites in situated Vidarbha region. After that Mauryan occupation in this area and majority of sites are belongs to Satvahana period.



1-MAP OF VIDARBHA

Study area:

The study area under this topic will focus on origin and development of Buddhism in the Vidarbha region and it's including all the modern political administrative units of eastern part of the Maharashtra state.



2-Map of Vidarbha (Source-Internet)

Time limit:

The present work will focus on the material cultural of Vidarbha region from 300 BCE to Historical period. In this process reasons for the evolution of Buddhism and its expansion in the area will be the core of the present study. In this process few excavated and large number of unexcavated and unexplored areas will be assessed and the data collected from the exploratory work will be utilized to analyze the situation in critical method.

The chronology ofBuddhism in Vidarbharegion has been constructed on the basic of archaeological data and literary evidence.

Previous work and present state of knowledge in the field:

The excavated sites from Vidarbha for which published data is available are Kaundinyapur, Paunar, Takalaghat-Khapa, Khairwada, Pauni, Naikund, Mahurjhari, Bhagimohari, Mandhal, Tharsa, Nagara, Arni, Arambha, Adam, Shirkhand, Pachkheri,

Bhawar, Hamlapuri, Mansar, Bramhapuri (district Chandrapur), Bhon (districtBuldhana), Kholapur (district Amaravti) and others.

As far as presence of Buddhism in Vidarbha is concerned, which is the main focus of this research, excavations at Pauni(Bhandara district), Adam(Nagpur district), Mansar(Nagpur district) and recently at the site of Bhon(Buldana district) have unearthed the evidence of stupa structures. New discoveries in the form of Buddhist sculptures or rock-cut caves had been reported. These studies notwithstanding, Buddhism in early historic Vidarbha has never been a main object of any detailed study. But few researches are worth mentioning, such as an article S.B. Deo focusing on *Hinayana* Buddhism in Vidarbha. Dr. PradeepMeshram also looked into various aspects such as the architecture of Buddhist cave, sculpture, and reading of inscriptions.

'Archaeology of Buddhism in Vidarbha region' on this topic less number of literarysources is available. Dr. PradeepMeshram, former HoD. Of Ancient History Culture and Archaeology, Nagpur University, besides him no one has done independent study on History of Buddhism in this region. He did some part of study but it is not enough to understand the comprehensive history of Buddhism in this area. He wrote one book in Marathi entitled,"Vidarbha Cha Buddha DhammachaItihas". V.V. Mirashi has done some work on the history of Vidarbha region but in his work history of Buddhism doesnot find any place. Similarly, Dr. Chandrashekhar Gupta wrote thesis on "VidarbhaKaSaskrutikItihas" and after he published books on some title but again, in his work Buddhism doesn't find appropriate space.

Dr. V.N. Meshram book name is "Eye Pavchiye Nagari" and ChandrabhanNarnavare book name is "RamtekParichay" both books written about Pauni and Ramtek.H.L. Kosare written some article and he published research thesis as a book "PrachinBhartatil Nag". B.J.Gokhale book "Buddhism in Maharashtra" and M.S. More book "Maharshtratil Buddha Dhammacha Itihas" both books written about Maharashtra Buddhism but they ignored Buddhism of Vidarbha region.

Dr. ReshmaSawant book “Historical ArchaeologyofVidarbha” wrote about Vidarbha. These booksare very usefulto understand the historyof this region but these narratives in this book is centered mainly on historical archaeology but in her article written about Buddhism of Vidarbha. On basis of these sources Vidarbha region neglected separate study on archaeology of Buddhism in Vidarbha region.

Before culture of the Buddhism: Early Iron Age Megalithic culture 700BCE advent - 300 BCE: Vidarbha is located on a very strategic position forming Maharashtra, viz., Buldhana, Akola, Washim, Amaravati, a link between northern and southern India. This location advantage seems to have proved very useful for cultural diffusion from north and south in Vidarbha. Numerous cultural currents passed through Vidarbha which cultivated reciprocal relationship and induced developments in various fields.This brought Vidarbha in political orbit of India from the very early stages of historical period. It has also been observed that the Chalcolithic and the Early Iron Age-Megalithic sites are located in the districts of Nagpur, Chandrapur, Bhandara and Gadchiroli. A very large number of Megalithic burials (burial types: stone circles, menhirs, and sarcophagus) as well as habitation sites occur in the eastern part of Vidarbha from 7^{th} - 6^{th} centuries BCE onward.

Archaeological evidence of Vidarbha region related to Buddhism:

Excavated sites:

There are many sites was excavated in Vidarbha region, mainly Kaudinyapur, Junapani, Takalghat-Khapa, Mahurzari, Paoni, Pavnar, Mandhal, Nayakund, and Nagara, Borgaon, Bhagemaheri, Chandala, Adam etc. In this excavated sitesmuch archaeological evidence reported which isrelated to Buddhism.

In Paoni found two stupa remains; this site had been excavated by R.T.M. Nagpur University, Deccan College Research Institute, Pune and India Govt. and Maharashtra Govt. archaeology department. Mansar had been excavated by A.S.I. and Japanese Society of India.

Inscriptions and copper plate:

The oldest inscription of Vidarbha from was belong to Ashokan period. This inscription found in Deotek village Districts Chandrapur. This inscription engraved by Mahamatya of Ashoka. They have been engraved religious message of Ashoka.

There are many no. of inscriptions was found from Adam and Paoni. Mahakshtrapa Rupiamma Pillar Inscription reported from Paoni. These inscriptions related Sunga-Satvahana period. Chandala, Patur, Mohadi in this rock-cut cave also having inscription. Nashik cave inscriptions also related to Buddhism of Vidarbha. Copper plate inscription related to Vakataka period and later Vakatak period. From this copper plateinscription we got information which is useful for study of Vidarbha Buddhism.

Coin:

Coin is a very important source of study History and Archaeology; its gives social, political and economic information of particular period. In Vidarbha found Roman coins and seals at Sapegaon, Adam, Tadli, Kholapur. Satvahana coins also available in this region. One seal found from Mahurzari excavation and this is related to Buddhism.

Art and Architecture:

Weknow about various stages about development and decline of Buddhism with help of art and architecture. In Vidarbha region here many caves and sculpture is available for study of Buddhism.

Chandala, Mandal, Satbhoki, Bhivkund, Garpaili(Nagpur District), Bijli, Kachargarh, Gaymukh, Koranbhi(Bhandara district), Bhadravati, Devalvada, Ghugghus, Mohadi,(Chandrapur Disrticts), Manjari(Amaravati district), Dhaga(Wardha District), Patur(Akola Disrict), Pipalgaonraja, Savali(Buldhana district), Kalanb, Nibdyarvha(Yawatmad district) etc. cave of Vidarbha region. We need to study all the sites very minutely. From Paoni excavationlot of engraved stone was reported. It was used in stupa. On that stone human form, stupa, Dhammachakra, Kalparuksha, Bodhi tree, Bhandrasan etc. mark realated to Hinyana Buddhism.

From Pavnar, Ramtek, Ballarpur, Adam, and Mansar found Buddha sculptureIn ReshmaSawant doctoral research, shehas attempted to show that *AshmakaMahäjanapada* was situated in the Wardha—Winganga valley and its cultural material can be identified with early Iron Age-Megalithic culture of Vidarbha.This period is marked by agro-pastoral economy with craft specialization; extensive and creative use of metals like iron and copper; use of horse and horse ornaments; intra-regional exchange/ trade; and a widespread ideology of erecting megaliths over the dead.

Thus, during c. 7^{th}—3^{rd} centuries BCE, when north India was experiencing the emergence of urbanization, Vidarbha witnessed a coexistence of agro-pastoral way of life in the form of Janapada formation and interwoven community of megalithic builders.

3-Photo of Map Buddhist Sites in Vidarbha (taken from book 'Vidarbha Buddha DammachaItihas' By Dr. Pradeep Meshram)

The Problem to be investigated:

There are numerous questions related with Buddhism of Vidarbha, but under this research topic here focus on two problems and taken up for the discussion. The first is nature of economy of the people and their subsistence pattern and the second problem is related to the nature of their social organization which has facilitated the reason for its origin and gradual development in the area.

Hypothesis or Research Questions:

1. To study the settlement pattern and their distribution
2. To identify the Early Historic sites.
3. To locate trade centers and trade routes.
4. To estimate the cultural transformation process that had taken place from the Iron Age to Early Historic.
5. To test the existing theories pertaining to urbanization and deurbanization.

Scope of the work:

The intensive field survey compounded with well-planned exploration and excavated material provided good scope to understand the settlement pattern that exited during iron age and early historic times and its cultural transformation. It also helped to test the exiting hypothesis and provided better visible data to understand the nature of settlement also the available literary data provided well scope of knowledge.

Methodology and Data Collection:

The study area primarily is in historical period. The methodology of investigated sites is village to village survey and analyzing the excavated material, available archaeological data for study of this region and literary data. The data collected from the A.S.I.the State Archaeology of Maharashtra, RTM Nagpur university, Deccan College, Pune and individual scholars. A village to village survey was undertaken to obtain full information of the sites like location, geo-co-ordination, geological wealth, flora, fauna, cultural items etc.The excavation of various sites yielded a comprehensive view on the archaeological wealth of this region.

Scheme of chapters or A tentative chapter plan:

i. **Introduction**

ii. **Physiography**

iii. **Political Background**

iv. **Survey of Buddhist establishment of Vidarbha**

v. **Buddhist Art, Architecture and Iconography of Vidarbha**

vi. **Buddhist Inscriptions of Vidarbha**

vii. **Conclusion**

This thesis is comprised of eight chapters including the introduction and conclusion. In the first introductory chapter, area of the study, scope of the study, aims and objectives of the study, available primary sources and its limitations are explained.

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